

## **Transition to Adulthood in the Post-Migratory Context: Young Africans in Canada**

### ***Description of the topic***

Parenting styles and parent-child relationships play a fundamental role in the adolescent transition process to adulthood, affecting several aspects of his life, from smoking habits to educational attainment; from mental health to reproductive outcomes. (Hanson, Morrison et al. 1989; Baumrind 1991; Dubois, Eitel et al. 1994; Blake, Simkin et al. 2001; Hale III, Engels et al. 2006)

The latter issue is very popular in some fields and affectionate by scholars of teenage and unplanned pregnancies and by students of marriage and family, but unfortunately remain mostly studied with a birth-oriented focus, leaving aside the related physical and psychological health issues, sexual knowledge and behaviours.

Not only research is scarce in analysis of these interplays, and even if differentials analysis include socioeconomic status inequalities or skin color as a proxy of ethnic discrimination, studies are even fewer to take into account the context of a family's migration history.

In the last decade, 25% of the United States population growth was caused by the net migration flux (Reagan and Olsen 2000). Young people that migrating with their families have to combine a cultural transition (from a region of the world to an other) to a social and normative one: their transition to adulthood.

Globalization and increased mobility of populations urge scholars to consider the cultural background of young immigrants when studying the transition process to adulthood; take for example the work of Hirschman (2001).

Normative aspects of adulthood and sexual and reproductive behaviours vary amid countries, regions and communities, therefore as the proportion of young immigrants increase in host societies, young people face different difficulties, meet various needs, and look for diverse form of information and support.

Sexual behaviors have been the focus of many studies on sub-Saharan Africa's youth, but much less in high income countries where even the situation of young natives is poorly known. Hence, we will compare the transition to adulthood of young African immigrants to Canada and young Canadians born in the country for at least three generations.

The ways intergenerational relationships influence adolescents' behaviors and the extent to which gender roles and relationships influence sexual behaviors among cultural groups will be addressed.

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## ***Theoretical focus***

Our work subscribes to the emerging adulthood theory and the life course approach in social sciences. Popularized by Arnett (2000; 2004; 2006) as an independent stage of the life course in America and other industrialized countries, the theory is supported by several demographic, psychological, social and economic features.

After outlining of the life course analysis approach and the relevance of the theory of emerging adulthood in our study to the latter, we will focus on emerging adults and their parents from the sub-Saharan region who migrated to Montréal (Canada) during the 1990s, and compare them to long-time settlers of European descent.

## ***Data and research methods***

As quantitative data is scarce on these issues, particularly regarding immigrants, we have designed a qualitative fieldwork in Montreal which is one of the main cities in Canada where these immigrants settle.

Over 100 focus groups have been conducted among French-speaking young males and females of each migration group (long-time migrants from European background and Sub-Saharan migrants of the 1990s) aged 16-24 as well as with parents and several key informants working in the health and educational system.

## ***Expected findings***

Preliminary results of focus groups and in-depth interviews show that while some strategies are widely shared by parents from each group:

- Parents rely on sexual education programs at school to sensitize their adolescent on sexuality.
- Parents do not expect the same behavior from their male versus their female children; moreover, the social pressure felt by young women can result in harmful behaviour.

specific perceptions vary:

- Gender issues are not perceived the same way; young pregnant African women for instance, seem to be more ostracized in their community than native Canadians.
- Intergenerational relations do not have the same impact in the education of children, explicitly regarding their sexuality.
- The purpose of sexual activity is not perceived nor explained the same way: sub-Saharan Africans address the topic in a more reproductive matter compared to their Canadian peers.

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## **Conclusion**

On one hand, our results highlight the importance for scholars of high-income countries to take into account in their research on youth, the increasing diversity of this growing segment of population.

On the other hand, and in terms of programmatic and sensitization issues, they also suggest that social workers in Montreal are not enough knowledgeable of sub-Saharan populations and cultures and thus cannot appropriately address their specific needs. Also, parents from all cultural backgrounds seem to lack of tools to show the way to young adults through their sexual transition.

Those results could interestingly be applied in other multicultural cities, as much as to other cultural communities.

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